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AUTHOR Richardson, Richard C., Jr.; Doucette, Donald S.
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ABSTRACT

A research project was conducted to develop and implement a model for community college missions. The new model would depart from existing models, which utilize a hierarchy of decreasing levels of generality beginning with institutional missions and culminating in objectives. In contrast, this research defined institutional mission in terms of groups of specific activities that are themselves made up of goals and objectives. These activities are defined in terms of the services provided by an institution, the specific clientele for which these services are provided, and the rationale that is commonly advanced for providing these services. In fall 1981, a research project based on this conceptualization was conducted in Arizona. A list of more than 400 statements representing activities related to all of the missions suggested for the Arizona community colleges was compiled, refined, and eventually reduced to a 60-item Community College Activities Survey (CCAS) instrument. The CCAS was administered to more than 3,500 state and local community college governing board members, administrators, faculty, legislators, and registered voters. Factor analysis and other statistical techniques were used to identify alternative operational missions and levels of support for them among the community college constituencies. Unlike previous goals research, the results of the CCAS application showed potential for affecting the management processes of higher education institutions. (LAL)

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AN EMPIRICAL MODEL FOR FORMULATING OPERATIONAL MISSIONS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by

Richard C. Richardson, Jr. and Donald S. Doucette
Department of Higher and Adult Education
Arizona State University
Tempe, Arizona 85287

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An Empirical Model for Formulating
Operational Missions for Community Colleges

Richard C. Richardson, Jr. and Donald S. Doucette
Department of Higher and Adult Education
Arizona State University
Tempe, Arizona 85287

ABSTRACT

A model for formulating community college missions in terms of constituent perceptions as revealed by empirical data was developed and implemented. This model was based upon an original conceptual framework that conceives of institutional missions as defined in terms of specific institutional activities, rather than in terms of hierarchically related goals and objectives. An original instrument, the Community College Activities Survey, was used to elicit perceptions of the Arizona community colleges from approximately 3,500 members of various college constituencies. Factor analysis and other techniques were used to identify alternative operational missions and levels of support for them. The method overcame the limitations of previous research on the purposes of higher education. Research using this model to define and apply the concept of institutional effectiveness was also described.

Introduction

A principal objective of research on the goals and purposes of colleges and universities is to affect the management of these institutions. Yet attempts to apply the results of goals studies and related research to the management processes of institutions of higher education have largely failed. This failure is particularly disappointing in that research has provided little assistance to institutions struggling to define their missions and focus their efforts in the face of the fiscal and demographic realities of the 1980's.

It appears that the principal cause of this general failure has been the inability of research studies to translate abstractions concerning the perceptions and attitudes of college constituents into concrete terms that can be incorporated into the management processes of colleges or universities. Previous attempts to relate institutional goals and missions into more concrete and useful objectives have been unsuccessful because they have assumed that qualitative constructs such as missions and goals can be reduced to quantitative performance objectives.

Objectives

It was the purpose of the research described here to develop and implement a model for goals research that does not depend upon the assumption that abstract goals can be effectively related to concrete objectives. Rather, this research proposed a conceptual framework and a model to formulate community college missions in terms of constituent perceptions of college purposes as revealed by study of the activities in which such institutions engage. The

model was developed to assist community colleges in defining alternative missions in clear unambiguous terms able to facilitate communication with diverse, and often unsophisticated, external constituencies. A fundamental assumption undergirding the research was the belief that improving communication with external, strategic constituencies was a first step toward resolving issues related to fiscal support. An example of one method of applying the model to study differences in priorities between administrative leaders and their external constituencies is also reported in this paper.

Previous Research

Virtually all goals research in higher education has used the Institutional Goals Inventory (IGI), or one of its specific adaptations, the Small College Goals Inventory (SCGI) or the Community College Goals Inventory (CCGI). These instruments were the culmination of goals research initiated in 1964 by Gross and Grambsch (1968, 1974) and then systematically developed by Peterson and Uhl (1977) and others in the 1970's. The numerous studies conducted using the IGI in the past ten years have provided descriptive data on constituent perceptions of the extent to which general, and typically non-controversial, goal statements describe the current orientation of the institution and the extent to which these goals should be emphasized. However, while the discrepancy between what "should be" (the desired goals) and what "is" (perceptions of current reality) provides interesting insights into value orientations of various constituencies, it has proven difficult to apply such perceptions to practical management tasks such as difficult decisions about allocating increasingly scarce financial and human resources (Cross, 1981; Breuder and King, 1976-1977; Piccinin and Joly, 1978). Indeed, Uhl (1978) foreshadows the approach taken in

this study by recommending the inclusion of specific institutionally derived statements to be used in tandem with the IGI. While this study is indebted to previous research for many of its essential concepts and research strategies, the conceptual framework for the relationships between institutional missions, goals and objectives constitutes a specific departure from previous research.

Conceptual Framework

Missions, goals and objectives have commonly been assumed to be related in a hierarchy of decreasing levels of generality beginning with missions and culminating in objectives, with goals as the intermediary construct. Missions, in the usage of this paper, are the expectations that external constituencies have for colleges and universities and the reasons for which they support these institutions; thus missions exist at the interface between an institution and its environment. Goals are more specific and commonly refer to the processes and intended outcomes of an institution; they are the aspirations that a college or university has for itself. Objectives are the most specific level of intended outcomes of the activities of an institution and are characterized by being precise, behaviorally measurable, and often only understandable to those affected by them. Figure 1 depicts the hierarchy which has served as the conceptual basis for previous attempts to identify and establish consensus on the purposes of higher education.

Despite this assumed hierarchical relationship, numerous attempts to define goals through aggregating objectives, including computerized simulation and

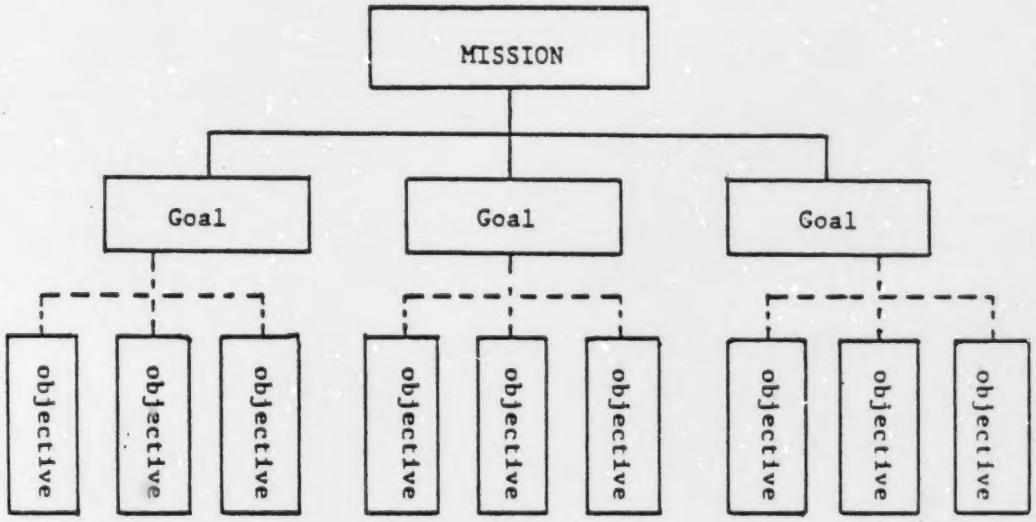

Figure 1. Common conceptualization of hierarchical relationship of missions, goals, and objectives.

resource allocation models, have failed because the two are not merely different levels of generality of the same concept; they are fundamentally different in nature. Goal statements are abstract, the qualitative outcomes that educators hope their efforts will achieve; objectives are concrete, the units of measure used in quantitatively oriented management systems. Fenske, in a critique of the use of goals and objectives in the management of colleges and universities, notes that there has been "intense interest" in developing a goals system that would "span the hierarchical levels from missions to specific objectives" (1980, p. 95). However, he concludes that in reality all attempts to mediate effectiveness goals and efficiency objectives have ended up relying upon an interface that is essentially a political process involving all of the

various interest groups and constituencies of an institution who may very well agree about the goals of the institution's efforts but who have different priorities for the allocation of scarce resources to achieve these consensus goals. "This negotiation process is indispensable, for there is no standard conversion table linking qualitative goals and quantitative measurement, no 'effectiveness to efficiency' concordance or dictionary" (p. 195).

Rather than attempting to define goals in terms of objectives, the research reported here proposes to link missions, goals and objectives in a different way. Figure 2 depicts a conceptual framework that defines institutional mission in terms of groupings of specific institutional activities which are themselves comprised of the characteristics of both goals and objectives. The construct of activity acts as a proxy for the relationship between goals and objectives and eliminates the necessity of translating goals into objectives. This central role of activities in the proposed scheme provides the primary contrast with the traditional hierarchy depicted in Figure 1. College or university missions, descriptions of overarching institutional purposes that are intended primarily to rationalize the institution to external constituencies, are defined here in terms of the specific activities in which institutions engage. These activities, in turn, are defined in terms of the services provided by an institution, the specific clientele for which these services are provided and the rationale that is commonly advanced for providing these services. The previously unbridgeable gap between objectives and goals is not an issue because missions are defined in terms of the specific activities in which an institution engages rather than the more abstract goals/objectives hierarchy.

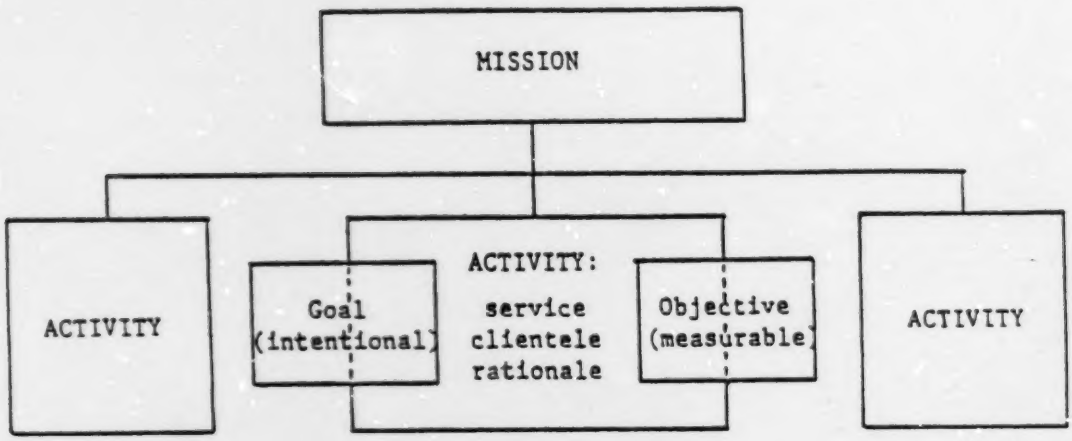

Figure 2. Conceptualization of missions defined by activities.

Activity statements that specify services performed, clientele served and rationale are useful in defining college and university missions because they exhibit the key characteristics of both goals and objectives--the intentionality of goals and the measurability of objectives. The following example illustrates this point:

> Community colleges offer courses and workshops in practical life skills, hobbies and crafts, and other general interest subjects to senior citizens for their general interest and recreation.

The activity statement identifies a service--offering courses and workshops in specific areas a clientele--senior citizens; and a rationale--for their general interest and recreation. The activity statement clearly contains a goal or intention. The statement also incorporates the potential for

measurement--whether senior citizens actually participate in such activities for purposes other than attaining a degree is a specific objective that can be measured. Grouping activities related to this one would define a mission, in this instance, providing general interest courses and activities for senior citizens and other community members.

Methods

In the fall of 1981, a research project based upon this conceptualization of institutional missions was conducted in Arizona under the sponsorship of the State Board of Directors for the Arizona Community Colleges. The study used the model to develop operational community college missions from groupings of related institutional activities, (Doucette, 1983).

The project staff compiled a list of more than 400 statements sufficiently general to include representative activities from all of the missions or potential missions suggested for community colleges in the literature or in the catalogs of community colleges in Arizona and representative institutions elsewhere. This list was edited and then validated as representative and comprehensive by community college board members, administrators and other experts in the field. The ninety-five activity statements that resulted were ordered randomly in a survey and administered to 1,169 evening students selected because they were a "captive audience" that was reasonably representative of registered voters, the most difficult to survey population to whom the final version would be administered. The usable responses to the pilot survey were analyzed using a principal axis factor analysis followed by varimax rotation. On the basis of this analysis, items were eliminated or combined,

reducing the initial 95 items to the 60 activities included in the Community College Activities Survey (CCAS).

The CCAS was administered to more than 3,500 state and local community college governing board members, administrators, faculty, state legislators and registered voters. With the exception of registered voters where the response rate was 31 percent, responses ranged from 48 percent for legislators to more than 94 percent for administrators. In all, 1,800 individuals responded to questions about the importance of 60 different activities and willingness to fund these activities with tax dollars. Additional information about the development and administration of the instrument as well as the items and data analysis are available from the ERIC system (Richardson, Doucette and Armenta, 1982).

Results

Responses to the importance question for the 60 activity statements were subjected to a principal components factor analysis. Twelve factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 emerged. Following varimax rotation, forty-eight of the 60 items loaded on these factors at .43 or higher. These factors were interpreted as twelve mission categories. These categories were statistically reliable, and more importantly, the activities which defined them exhibited obvious logical and semantic commonalities that could be interpreted and expressed in concrete verbal terms.

The twelve mission categories identified by the study differed substantially both from the missions previously stated for Arizona community colleges

and from traditional mission statements found in the literature. These differences are displayed in Table 1. The fundamental characteristic that distinguished the mission categories defined in this study from those that appear in the literature was the emphasis upon a specific client group. Six of the twelve missions related to serving special clientele, including minority groups, the handicapped, residential students, high school students and non-high school graduates. The emphasis upon clientele sharply contrasts with the program or service orientation of definitions that appear in the literature. Legislators and registered voters, who together represented more than three-fourths of the respondents, reported very similar viewpoints. Clearly, for these external constituents, community college mission was at least as much a function of who these colleges served as what they offered.

Importance

The model has proven useful in several applications. First, the results of the study have been used by the state board in Arizona to review their mission statement. The review has contributed to a better understanding of why the terminology used by professionals in describing community college mission frequently does not communicate a useful understanding of what such institutions are attempting to accomplish. While statements complaining about the difficulty of interpreting mission to the legislature have not disappeared from meetings of community college leaders, there appears to be a better understanding of some of the root causes of such difficulties. More importantly, the study disclosed the similar priorities held by legislators and registered voters as well as the extent to which evening students, long viewed

Table 1

Comparison of Operationally Defined Missions with Current State Board Missions for Arizona Community Colleges and Traditional Missions Derived from the Literature

State Board Missions	Operational Missions*	Traditional Missions
1. Academic transfer programs	1. Associate degree, programs (transfer, occupational and general education)	1. Academic transfer programs
2. General education programs	2. General interest courses and activities for senior citizens and others	2. Occupational programs
3. Occupational programs	3. Special services for minority groups	3. Basic skills programs
4. Continuing education programs	4. Entry-level vocational training	4. Continuing education programs
5. Counseling, advisement and job	5. Special services for handicapped students	5. Community service programs
6. Cultural and community service	6. Program-related student activities	6. Student support services
	7. Facilities and services for community and business groups	
	8. Credit courses for high school students	
	9. Facilities and services for non-residents of the local community	
	10. Credit courses for non-high school graduates	
	11. Basic skills instruction (reading, writing and mathematics)	
	12. Special services for high ability students	

as an important source of support for increased funding for an expanded mission, shared reservations about public funding for many of the activities in which community colleges engage. It is no longer possible in Arizona for administrators to assume that legislative refusal to increase funding for activities low on their list of priorities can be overcome by appeals to part-time students who presumably ought to favor more public for the courses they take but, in fact, do not.

Conversely, administrators discovered that some of their assumptions about legislative and general public resistance to special funding for remedial education were incorrect. Basic skills turned out to be a higher priority for funding with legislators than it did with administrators. Similarly, there was strong support among legislators for special programs aimed at improving opportunities for the handicapped and for high school students. Partly, as a result of the study, the state board staff adopted funding strategies aimed at capitalizing on the high priority concerns of legislators rather than pursuing the previous strategy of seeking enrichment for a general funding formula. The study made clear that attempts to enrich the general formula had been unsuccessful because legislators believed funds appropriated for community colleges had been used to support activities representing an inappropriate use of public funds.

Most recently, this approach to defining college mission has been used to study institutional effectiveness according to the resource dependence model proposed by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978). The resource dependence model defines effectiveness as the degree of correlation between the priorities of an organization and the expectations for organizational behavior held by external

constituents who control resources necessary to the organization's continuing viability. To the extent that administrators emphasize activities perceived as inappropriate or low priority by legislators, registered voters or state boards who jointly determine available resources, their institutions are ineffective and can expect to encounter conflict in pursuing their mission. When differences are identified, administrators may either modify their emphasis or attempt to persuade strategic constituencies to change their views about what constitutes appropriate and important activities for a community college.

Armenta (1984) has operationalized this model and used it with the activity generated concept of mission to study differences in levels of effectiveness between an urban and a rural district. In general, he found that the rural district was receptive to a broader range of services than the urban district where there were more social agencies competing to provide the same services. Also identified by the study were important differences in priorities within districts. Strategic groups, for example, placed a higher priority on using public funds to provide scholarships for high ability students, to offer literacy training and to provide counseling and advisement services than administrators. In contrast, strategic groups were quite resistant to special treatment for any groups perceived to be capable of looking after themselves. Thus administrators placed a much higher priority on services to minority groups, special programs for women and services for non-native English speakers than did their strategic groups.

Conclusion

The conceptual framework underlying the goals research model described in this paper assumes that the activities of an institution are a direct and tangible expression of the institution's mission. While the results of this form of analysis may not coincide with stated goals of the type contained in institutional charters, governing board guidelines, or even current catalogs; current activities are accurate and realistic goal indicators, and as such, are directly useful in guiding approaches to some of the challenging management tasks facing today's administrators.

The value of defining institutional mission in terms of the activities in which colleges engage as distinct from the philosophical goals to which these activities presumably relate was emphasized. The Community College Activity Survey provided results that could be related to institutional priorities and to the resource allocation process. Because the instrument did define institutional missions and priorities in specific operational terms, state board members and institutional administrators found the results useful in understanding and coping with their environment. The concept of activity-driven missions offers one useful alternative to the hierarchical objectives/goals model which currently dominates most research on mission.

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